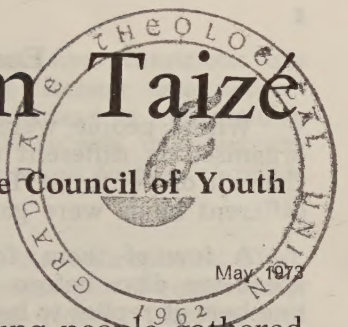
SEP 25 1973



Letter from Taizé

Preparing for the world-wide Council of Youth

May 1973

Writing to groups of young people gathered for Easter at different places in Africa and Latin America, I told them of the small children who come and kneel beside me for the common prayer here. Often, before the prayer begins, we whisper things to one another. Recently I asked Jean-Paul, who is four, who we were going to pray for. He replied, "For all the people in the world".

For a young child to have such a sense of the universal ! True, for two thousand years we have been singing our crazy hope in a Christ come to set free every human being, not just a few privileged people but all men of every tribe and race and people.

Therefore, in the struggle for the voice of the voiceless to be heard, in the struggle for human liberation, we are not going to stay in the rearguard of mankind. Our place lies in the front lines.

Roger, your brother

Easter at Taizé

Whilst people were taking part in various meetings organised in different continents in preparation for the Council of youth, at Taizé 18.000 young people from 100 different lands were gathered to celebrate Easter.

A few of them, forming an intercontinental team, spent ten days before Easter working on the enormous numbers of replies to last year's questions. And they themselves brought the intuitions of the youth of their own various lands : India, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), several parts of Latin America, of Africa and Europe. This team included a portuguese migrant worker and a black American woman, mother of a family who, with her husband and other couples, has been active at Taizé since last year, helping with the meetings.

On the evening of Easter Day, after the Mass celebrated by the bishop of Autun, brother Roger began :

"Since the Council of youth was announced three years ago, a major part of my responsibility has been to listen and to sum things up, not only with the intercontinental team but, day after day, with quantities of young people from every continent. In exceptional circumstances my responsibility can also involve decision-making, but needless to say as rarely as possible.

Our advance has never been brought to a stand-still. This shows the vitality bearing you along from within on this march — in these past three years it has more than once had deserts to cross, has known and knows oppositions, with some people wanting to take us over and use us.

But all together we bear one another along, by an unshaken trust. Together we are learning to leap over barriers, and also are forcing our way out of our own personal prisons : in short, the real power of the provisional.

During the coming year, your new intuitions are eagerly awaited. By them we shall discover what undertakings are most important. They will lead us to creativity such as we had never imagined. They will manifest unsuspected energies. We shall go so much further than we thought three years ago."

Then Joseph from Zaire took the microphone. First, he mentioned those who had sent messages of communion from Africa, Australia, South and North America and various European lands (including one message from Philip Potter, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches). He also announced that Cardinal Marty, the archbishop of Paris, was due to arrive at Taizé, where he would stay overnight.

Joseph evoked a number of recent journeys, particularly in Islamic lands. He also announced that a telegramme had been received from Pope Paul and that this year, from September 28 to October 1, the Archbishop of Canterbury was coming to Taizé "to give his support to the preparation of the Council of youth". He went on to point out that there were small children present — *"Supposing we were to look for ways of including children in our common prayers at home this year, wherever we live — wouldn't that be a good idea ?"*

Then, with the other young people of the intercontinental team, he presented both the first main lines of the world-wide Council of youth, and also the theme for 1973. These are the following two texts (pages 6-7 and 8-9).

Finally, brother Roger concluded :

"In 1974, how will the Council of youth begin ? How will the first main lines that have just been announced be put into practice ? What will be the first parable on our way forward ? One idea has come from Africa and has been retained :

Amongst other things, the first year of the Council of youth will be one of great mobility, from continent to continent. There will be several successive openings of the Council of youth, from one continent to another. Next year at Taizé, the opening of the Council of youth will take place from August 30 to September 2, 1974. Then, in the months following, other openings of the world-wide Council of youth will take place one after another in Africa, Latin America, Asia and North America."

Then all those present were invited to form a nocturnal procession : "We are going to undertake a first march here on the hill, an image of the pilgrim Church that is ever on the move."

So a whole people set out in the night. Torches at intervals, candles lit and blown out again, songs of the resurrection, silence, alternation of very different elements with each one finding his own pace in the rhythm of the whole.

☆

"Struggle and Contemplation" will be the title of brother Roger's next book, due to appear soon in French ("Lutte et Contemplation") and later in an English translation. It will be taken from his personal journal between 1970 and 1972, continuing on from *"Ta Fête soit sans Fin". This latter book is now published in English at Taizé as "Festival...".*

Another book soon to appear is *"Preparing for the Council of youth : dare to live"* — put together by a group of young people from all the continents. (Edited by SPCK for Great Britain etc with USA edition following.)

In addition to the Letter from Taizé, *a new review to help deepen the reflexion in preparing the Council of youth is now published :* COMMUNION. *It contains texts, articles and interviews of greater length. The first number is now in print, in french, italian and german. An english edition is anticipated for the future. Subscription : 15 french francs for one year (4 issues).*

ABOUT BEING SELF-SUPORTING

In the preparation for the Council of youth, how does the self-financing work — each one having their share of responsibility ?

At Taizé there are two accounts, one for the Community and another for the preparation for the world-wide Council of youth.

The Community lives uniquely by its work, and has nothing in the way of reserves. From its very earliest days, it has always refused to accept gifts for itself. At present it would even go so far as to refuse any personal inheritance coming to an individual brother through the death of a member of his family.

For the preparation of the world-wide Council of youth, no gift from any organisation or Church has ever been accepted. Just as the people at the Taizé meetings exercise 'auto-vigilance' — each one being called to be responsible — so likewise everything is self-financing (reception, food, heating, purchase of tents, communications, mailing, travel, the "Letter from Taizé" and "Communion", etc.).

It ought perhaps to be said that only one subscription in five to the "Letter from Taizé" is being paid for. But it is sent to 132 different countries and the cost of mailing alone is considerable.

The journeys made by young people are paid for, as far as possible, by the people making them or others who contribute towards them. When there is nothing in the account, journeys that have been prepared have to be given up (this has happened each year after Easter).

Another thing : although it would be important for all the means used at Taizé to remain poor, it seems important to find a way of reducing the cold under the tents — basic hospitality demands it ! So many people found the cold at Easter too much to bear.

The first main lines of the world-wide Council of youth

In our march towards the Council of youth, through an intense preparation, one certainty is growing stronger : we are moving towards an event which will demand more and more of us, far from offering any short-cuts. What will it be ? Already, from the multiple replies received from young people, three main lines are sure :

set out as a whole people on the move together ;
explore all the dimensions of the people of God ;
on our way, create parables and gestures which will be signs of contradiction according to the Gospel.

1. The fact of having chosen
to gather in a world-wide Council of youth
has prepared us to live an event
in and of the Church.

   Setting out as a whole people on the move, we are determined to ensure a radical re-birth of the whole people of God, in order that the Church be true to its universal calling, that it become a place of communion for all men, especially attentive to those who are poor, a Church devoid of means of power, in no way compromised with the powers of exploitation.

2. To begin with, the Council of youth will seek
— without fear of the unknown —
to explore simultaneously
all the dimensions of the people of God :

The dimension of depth : moving from doubt towards belief ; so searching down more and more to a source — the encounter with the Risen Christ.

The dimension of breadth : seeking to inscribe the Gospel within the history of men ; sharing in the struggle of those who are oppressed ; uniting ourselves too with those who, without sharing our belief, are bearers with us of a common hope.

The dimension of height : a sense of the gratuitous ; revealing to one another the creative capacities hidden within every human being and so working out our search in the beauty of common prayer, in art and in all the ways by which men express themselves.

3. We shall let our communion spring up and mature in unaccustomed ways :

While always maintaining the interior adventure, as we advance we shall strive to create together parables and gestures that speak to our deepest selves and which, better than words, assert our hope. Without any long-term plans decided in advance which would prevent us being free to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the new generations, not following ordinary conference procedures, we shall advance from one provisional stage to another.

All the time there will be a constant process of summing up the suggestions coming from all the continents.

Before the opening of the world-wide Council of youth,
in this new stage of preparation,
there remains one intuition to be explored :

STRUGGLE AND CONTEMPLATION TO BECOME MEN AND WOMEN OF COMMUNION

« Becoming signs of contradiction according to the Gospel »
is leading us to be, at the same time,
tireless SEEKERS OF COMMUNION.

The communion that we are discovering
does not mean running from crises and confrontations, it is always the fruit of pain and labour.

It unites us first and foremost
with the man who is oppressed,
with whom we long to strive
for our mutual liberation.

It is a communion full of new energy :
crossing, one after another, all the frontiers
set up by age, culture, race...
until it can reach out to include all the millions
of peasants, workers, unemployed, students,
migrants...
who in the southern continents especially
are writing — by their lives — in letters of fire
the reality we are seeking.

Any seeker of communion
with God and with man
is at once seized by the tension :
STRUGGLE AND CONTEMPLATION.
Two attitudes that seemed to contradict or oppose each other, and finally one is found to lie at the heart of the other,
each begetting the other
in a ceaseless exchange.

STRUGGLE within ourselves,
to be freed from interior prisons
and from the desire to imprison others ;
to throw aside all that breaks our communion.
And struggle in company with the man who is poor,
so that his voice may be heard,
oppressions smashed
so that together we can be re-born
to new relationships of communion.

CONTEMPLATION,
setting out in quest
of a communion with the Risen Christ,
so that the gift of our lives can be rooted there,
and so that little by little
our way of looking can be transformed
until we consider man and the universe
with the eyes of Christ himself.

Still situated
in the underground movement of the Church,
more and more aware
that we are not alone in our struggle,
each one borne forward by the others,
this year we are called
to work out this intuition :

STRUGGLE AND CONTEMPLATION
TO BECOME MEN AND WOMEN OF COMMUNION.

From the Congo :

In February some young people of Brazzaville met together to ask what were the consequences of the festival of the Risen Christ for them in their own daily lives :

God incarnate in Jesus Christ broke down taboos (by working on Saturday, which was sacrilege), established morality (visiting notorious sinners), fatalism (thanks to him discouraged fishermen threw their net out once more), boundaries (by curing the servant of a Roman centurion), social barriers (the publican, a thug hired by the colonial power, began to give away his riches), he restored dignity and meaning to the lives of the oppressed (the prostitute who discovered love and became a woman again).

This liberating power of Jesus is love, the subversive love of God, encountered as we give our lives for our brothers and opening towards resurrection. So the only 'plan' that God has for us is that we should develop, without limitations or restraint, the creative power of love in every sphere of life — political, economic, artistic, scientific, emotional...

Tackling the question as to what currently demands our involvement in order to help men in our own land, we made the following affirmations :

Talking about faith will do no good whatever in the political field so long as our words are not linked to more intensive voluntary involvement in mass action...

Another question for christians here is the situation of woman. She is the victim of deep-rooted prejudices, of an education that does not prepare her to bear responsibilities and make decisions, and of economic and legal discrimination. She is considered an object and used like one. How can love develop in these conditions ? We must try to establish frank and healthy mixing between young people of both sexes ; we must fight the dowry-system until it is simply a symbol instead of being an exorbitant price paid for a wife ; and as couples learn to share tasks and decisions. If solidarity between the young developed it could protect them from the despotism of traditional

hierarchies and the resulting magic — for example, the obligation to find one's wife in one's own ethnic group.

It also seems vital to rediscover the authenticity of African culture. The educational system is at present imitated from that in France. It bestows privilege on a few and cuts them off from manual work. It does not produce men and women equipped to solve their country's problems.

Christians have also to discover what elements of our traditional culture can open ways to share the message of Christ « love one another as I have loved you ». What gestures, celebrations or traditional insights can be integrated into christian living and education or into the liturgy of worship ?

These are a few insights to pursue. If we deepen them and try to put them into practice in our lives, we shall make a great contribution towards man's liberation, to the struggle against tribalism and to the renewal of the Church ; the Council of youth will be a decisive stage on the way.

From a southern continent :

I know that you have heard of the chaotic political situation in my country. I only wonder how long this will last, what will happen in the coming months or years. The struggle to be free, truly free, is hard and long. Many of my friends may be dead by now — with the muffled press no one knows much. Some have lost their sanity through tortures to get after hidden 'secrets' of movements ; now, they have no awareness even of the affection surrounding them.

I can only wonder how much more blood, how many more lives will be broken... ? Many people are now aware of the falseness of this administration, that lets a tyrant rule them, with all powers placed in one man. Now the people are chafing from high prices, higher taxes, too many restricting laws not fully understood. Even the Churches cannot do anything. These are indeed trying times.

It is strange and ironic that although we do not meet any more with friends (not allowed to), a closer communion has come to exist among us. We are not aware of everyone's where-abouts. It has become a danger to do so. Yet the old ties have become precious and the regret that we really did not exert much effort to know each other before under pleasant times comes to nag us to become better neighbours to all people. I catch myself thinking of people I did not care for before. Now I worry about them, aware of their needs and their physical weaknesses.

A passage from an earlier *Letter from Taizé* struck me : « When the world will no longer receive christians, they go down to the catacombs. » Well, here we are. The Church of committed christians has gone underground. Think of us and pray for us.

A glimpse of China :

A travelling cell of people from Europe and Sri Lanka (Ceylon) has spent several months meeting and listening to young people in Hong Kong, Australia, the New Caledonian and Fiji Islands and New Zealand.

In Hong Kong, after many days of meetings and visits, we decided to make the 40 minute bus ride to the Chinese frontier. We were accompanied by two young women, one from Korea, the other from Vietnam.

Leaving the bus we walk a few hundred meters, and find ourselves against a rather solemn fence beyond which stretches a shady path : China ! We climb a hill and glimpse : a little river, fields, some small villages and a few fishermen who are for us the representatives of 700 million others. We feel very close and yet very distant and foreign.

In Australia, we were able to have many contacts with Aborigines, either with individuals or in the visits we were allowed to make to "reserves". One told us how so often a whole tribe is forced off its home land — where fruit grows and game can be found — and is "rehoused" on a patch of land without hope of anything ever growing there often without water for irrigation. Then while the original lands are stripped of the nickel or copper found there, the

Aborigines are enclosed by a fence and left to die of famine or despair.

In one reserve we learned something of the differences between the various tribes, all with their own tongue, all with 10.000 years of history. How the Northern tribes, in their dances, have a sense of the artistic, room for improvisation, while in the Center, perfection lies in exact imitation of a received model for both movements and body-decorations.

We were told, *"No one has tried to learn the language spoken here ; the whites wait for us to learn enough English. But how can there be any real understanding on that basis ? If you cannot understand the words used, can you understand the silences between the words ?"*

From North America :

I have been thinking about reconciliation — and I realise more and more that reconciliation between black and white is so complex ! ... Maybe for some people it is still a 'Black-White' conflict — but for me it is never that ! I see black and white Americans trying to gloss over their differences, pretending they don't exist ; holding hands and singing "We shall overcome" or "Black and white together" .. but I feel that reconciliation cannot be on that level — that for me is an escape, leaving the tensions below.

In Chicago, I was put face to face with how the historical background has so colored the concepts of Americans. One cannot pretend that this does not exist, nor can one blame anyone — but I think that if there is to be reconciliation this needs to be accepted, and worked through. There is a history, here in the States, of slavery and oppression — in Europe there is a history of colonialism and paternalism which still exists in the whole economic structures between the West and developing countries .. Can we begin to trust each other enough to risk stepping out together, to gradually come to challenge each other and go somewhere together ? This surely will demand radical changes for both sides, for reconciliation is two-way — you cannot force the other to be reconciled by going your way !

I can see, through some very vivid experiences, that it is just as hard for black Americans and Africans to be reconciled (either here or in Africa) even though there are so many "Afro-studies" here. The reasons are different, but there are real barriers — as there are cultural problems between white Americans and Europeans :

It is not just plain 'black and white'.

From Quebec :

When I look around here in Quebec, where material affluence has grown very rapidly and where the Church is in a crisis that may still be adolescence, I can see how many families have chosen, at least for the time being, to construct a very material kind of happiness and shut out all the questions. So life passes in a kind of comfort — a parody of happiness — and you might end up thinking that life, real life, is nothing more than that. Days pass and a wilderness grows in the heart of the affluence. That is why the Council of youth interests me — it is a voice that can cry in this wilderness.

For the people I know, the biggest attraction of the preparation for the Council of youth is the way that it offers a possibility of experiencing God in depth. They are beginning to discover that they must first be attentive to what lies within them if they are to be really attentive to God.

And the young people of Quebec reckon that they have something to say : the Council of youth could be their opportunity. Rediscovering the Church with hope and freshness, opening to the world at large, waking up to other peoples' problems — that is a change for Quebec. The young here are hardly ever familiar with outside events, and very rarely politically aware.

There is a lot of vitality deep within them all, as there is a lot of life dormant under the great blanket of snow covering Quebec now.

For the USA and Canada : the subscription for the *Letter from Taizé* (2 Dollars) may be sent to :

'Letter from Taizé', 2150 Almaden Road 114 ; San Jose, Ca. 95125 USA.

This address is not for correspondance, which should always be sent direct to Taizé, France.

MEETINGS in 1973

Registration to be sent to : MEETINGS, 71460 - Taizé-Community, France.
(It will be registered, you will not receive any acknowledgment.)

Name :

First Name :

Address

(with zip-code and country)

Profession : ..... Age : .....

Will take part in the week from Monday ..... to Sunday .....

Has already taken part in a meeting at Taizé : Yes-No

Is bringing own tent : Yes-No

Will be part of the work-team (arriving Friday afternoon) Yes-No

Can be part of reflexion-groups in italian — german — french — english — spanish — portuguese .....

Can undertake simultaneous translation from ..... into .....

Need ..... more registration forms / Information material.

Please remember to write announcing your arrival ! Then the work of welcoming and feeding you is much easier...

International meetings at Taizé

Dates : every week from June 25 to November 4, from the Monday evening to the following Sunday afternoon.

For those between 15 and 17 : a meeting will be organised September 6 to 9, 1973.

Overall theme : "Struggle and contemplation to become men and women of communion" (see pp. 8-9).

Several different meetings together : the year's theme will be gone into from different angles and with different methods of approach in various different forms of meeting each week.

Each person will be free to chose what suits them best, and most exactly corresponds to their own form of commitment.

Retreat and silence : A house and camping site will be set aside for those people wishing to spend a week in silence, thinking for themselves, praying.

Age : for people between 18 and 29 years of age.

Accommodation : in private or collective tents. It is essential to bring your own sleeping-bag, blankets and mattresses — bring a tent if you can.

Cost : depends on each one's sense of responsibility. (Normal price : 90 p. UK., 2 dollars USA per day, food included). All who can give more than this, as a way of sharing with those who come from a long way away, or who for other reasons are not able to contribute financially.

Helping : People who want to help with all the material jobs that there are tell us when they register. It means coming to Taizé by the Friday afternoon before the meeting itself begins in each week.

Letter N° 14

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